

# Women in trades: Barriers and challenges

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## Abstract:

This research addresses the implicit bias women seeking to enter and remain in the male-dominated building trades experience as a result of their gender. Implicit bias within masculine dominated workplaces has a deleterious effect on the hiring and retention of women in trades, so it is important for policy makers, employers, stockholders, and union officials to address these deficiencies through a strategy for decreasing masculine dominance in the workplace. As skill shortages and a weakened labor supply loom for the construction industry, it is important to seriously consider why women's participation in the construction industry remains below legal and necessary limits. Hiring and retaining more women in the building trades would fill the predicted future construction vacancies.

Situated in political economy theory, this study surveyed 29 women in union-sponsored apprenticeship programs. Analysis of data collected from survey instruments and personal interviews reveal gatekeeping barriers and covert discriminatory practices to women seeking to enter the building trades.

Recommendations for addressing these barriers include enforcing government policies which mandate more women in the trades, changing the masculine culture of union/employer construction workplaces through the promotion of mentoring components in apprenticeship programs which provide to women one-on-one support, and making concerted efforts within the firm toward implementation of more gender neutral, family-friendly, and work-life balance policies.